

**Testimony Regarding Raised House Bill # 7027**  
***An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending***  
***June Thirtieth 2019, and Making Appropriations Therefor***  
**Presented to the State of Connecticut General Assembly, Appropriations Committee**  
**Thursday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017**

My name is **Kate Caristo-Scalora** and I represent Reliance Health. Our agency is a private, nonprofit organization that offers community based mental health services throughout Eastern Connecticut.

Each year we partner with approximately 1000 adults to enhance their health through a variety of community based programs. We help individuals develop strategies to manage their symptoms, prevent crisis and move towards long term recovery. With this support, emergency room visits and hospitalization are often avoided. We also help individuals achieve life goals, such as, obtaining employment and pursuing secondary education. When an individual is hired at a job or earns a college degree, they are not only realizing a dream but also making contributions that will strengthen our state economy. We provide these valuable services at a mere fraction of the cost of similar state run programs. Budget cuts to community mental health services will create a significant burden on our agency and our ability to meet the needs of the individuals we serve. If our funding is reduced, the individuals we serve and their needs will still exist. Underfunding mental health services inevitably leads to higher utilization of emergency services & higher costs to the state.

The majority of the funding that our agency receives is from grants from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. In only four (4) out of the last twenty six (26) years, has our grant funding increased to keep pace with inflation. This means that in twenty two (22) of the last twenty six (26) years we have actually lost purchasing power and ground to inflation. Like so many non-profit providers, we are continually asked to provide more with less. Despite this challenge, we persevere and continue to provide quality mental services. We still manage to attract creative and talented employees who come to work at Reliance Health with Bachelors or Masters Degrees. Most employees start at only \$14.15 per hour. They often struggle to manage expenses associated with significant student loan debt, high health insurance costs, and childcare. To manage, many employees rely on state benefits or a second job to supplement their income. I often wonder at what point will many members of our dedicated workforce no longer be able to afford working for our agency? At what point will our agency no longer attract such a skilled and dedicated workforce? If nonprofit community based mental health services are cut, we may reach that tipping point. Despite our state's budget shortfalls it is so important that policy makers ensure that nonprofits are *adequately* funded to reflect inflation and the increased cost of living.

**In closing, I hope my remarks today have illustrated the value and importance of nonprofit community based mental health services. I urge you to preserve funding for this essential service.** I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.